Spring 1982

Role Conflict, Role Ambiguity and Job Tenure and Their Relationship to Absenteeism

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ROLE CONFLICT, ROLE AMBIGUITY AND JOB TENURE AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO ABSENTEEISM

BY

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B.A., University of Central Florida, 1980

THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Master of Science degree in Industrial Psychology
in the Graduate Studies Program of the College of Arts and Sciences
University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Spring Semester
1982

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Introduction

The term "stress" has been given various definitions and is most often defined as any influence which disturbs the natural equilibrium of the body. McGrath (1976) defines stress potential when the environmental situation is perceived as presenting a demand which threatens to exceed the person's capabilities and resources for meeting it, under conditions where he expects a substantial differential in rewards and costs from meeting or not meeting the demand.

Stress has been studied for many years. In fact, Hippocrates, twenty-four centuries ago, recognized that disease was not only the suffering of the body but also a kind of stress in the body's fight to restore itself to its own prior natural healthy state. Modern-day researchers have concentrated largely on man's environment and how it may increase stress, both physiologically and psychologically.

How stressors are perceived psychologically by the individual may be largely responsible for the onset of stress. Physiological and psychological reactions may result. In other words, how the individual appraises environmental events and situations may be directly related to a stress induced reaction. A situation perceived as

non-stressful by one individual will not necessarily be perceived as non-stressful by all individuals (Ainsworth, 1958).

Actual experienced environmental events, such as the loss of a job, may result in stress. In addition, the expectation of such an event may result in a stress-induced reaction as well. Thus, response to stressors are determined by the degree to which the event is seen as harmful, challenging or threatening (Lazarus, 1966).

There is literature to substantiate that stress may come from several classes of environmental factors. Some stressors such as natural disasters and relocation, may effect large numbers of people. Another category may comprise those events which probably happen to everyone in the course of a lifetime, but at different times. An example of this type of stressor would be death or illness of a loved one, or other significant loss. This category effects fewer people at one time but also challenges adaptive abilities (Baum, Singer, & Baum, 1981).

Baum, Singer and Baum (1981) recently studied Lazarus and Cohen's theory of a class of stressors known as "daily hassles." These stressors are usually chronic and represent problems encountered in daily life. Included in this group would be the "hassles" that relate to the job.

Walter B. Cannon (1967) maintained that the living being strives to maintain a constancy or a homeostasis.

This striving results in the propensity of human beings to adapt or adopt coping mechanisms to rid themselves of stress. Individuals have varied ways of carrying out this coping process.

Individuals may use mechanisms which deal with the stress-inducing situation in a manner which reduces the stress. However, the coping process may not attack the problem at its source; thus it will have little or no effect on the reduction of stress. Students working towards doctoral examinations have been shown to exhibit aggressiveness as a form of coping. Whether or not this form of coping is actually useful in reducing the stress depends on whether or not the aggression attacks the source of the problem.

Lazarus (1966) cites escape as another means of coping with stress. Other mechanisms include hopelessness and helplessness (Seligman, 1975). These syndromes result when the individual is either unable, perceptually or in reality, to cope with the stress or lacks the opportunity to cope. An example of this would be an animal being restrained in cold water. The restrained animal would lack the opportunity to swim to warmth and safety.

Stress can be measured in the laboratory. Laboratory experiments have limited generalizability to the outside world. Therefore, where stress-moderating variables may be applicable in the laboratory, such as support in a

fearful situation, these findings may or may not be applicable in the real world outside the laboratory.

On the other hand, actual field observations, where sustained physiological disorders result from stress-induced events, are more likely to generalize to other situations. In field studies, people can be studied while actually experiencing the stress situation; thus these findings are more likely to be generalizable to other like situations.

Seyle (1956) advanced the theory of a General Adaptation Syndrome (G. A. S.) as a stress response. He expressed by this theory the belief that while stressors are constitutionally different, they all result in the same physiological arousal in the organism. He maintained that pleasant as well as unpleasant events can result in stress and thus the same biological response. He postulates that the G. A. S. consists of three stages: the alarm reaction, a state of resistance, and the stage of exhaustion. The animal becomes aroused and responds physiologically to the stressor; next, adaptation occurs and arousal drops to near normal; however, if the stressor is not removed, exhaustion results. Symptoms in this final stage resemble those of the alarm reaction. This last stage was indicative of a complete breakdown of the system where coping is no longer possible. Seyle's studies with laboratory

animals found that this pattern was followed repeatedly.

Seyle's theory is not universally accepted and is refuted by some scientists who favor a more specific patterning of endocrine responses to different stressors. However, others in addition to Seyle have found virtually no difference in the response to psychological stress and actual direct assault on body tissue. Emotional stress, as well, has been found to display the same pattern of arousal.

Going back to the category of stress labeled as "daily hassles" will lead to further investigation of a particular facet of that category: more specifically, stresses encountered by the worker at his place of employment. The impact of environmental stressors such as temperature, humidity, noise and vibrations all fall into this category. Other work-related stressors can be defined as physical, psychological, and of long or short duration.

Demands arise from the physical environment and from factors inherent in work itself. Demands also arise from the psychosocial environment. It is in this psychosocial environment that the concept of roles begin. The word "role" is borrowed directly from the theatrical term. Roles are attributable to certain bahaviors rather than to the individual. Roles are norms that apply to

groups of people. Each individual plays more than one role. However, when one employee is asked or expected to fulfill two or more conflicting roles, role conflict results. This is dysfunctional for the individual and for the organization. Likewise, another dysfunctional result for the individual and the organization results when a role player is asked or expected to carry out his role with no definition as to what that role comprises. This situation results in role ambiguity. If an employee's profession, occupation, or work results in role conflict or role ambiguity, research indicates myriad adverse work-related outcomes (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964; Lyons, 1971; House & Rizzo, 1972; Ivancevich & Donnelly, 1974; Organ & Green, 1974).

If an extremely noxious situation is created in the work environment by stress, which is antagonistic to most employees, various major psychological theories (e.g., field theory, balance theory, and reinforcement theory) can be used to show that the individual employee will try to avoid these antagonistic or aversive situations. If the individual finds his work situation antagonistic or aversive, he will try to avoid it by displaying withdrawal behaviors such as tardiness, absenteeism or by leaving the organization.

The function of the present research will be to

determine if perceived stress as defined by role conflict and role ambiguity result in an increase in employee withdrawal (Gupta & Beehr, 1979). More specifically, the question to be answered will be, Do role conflict and role ambiguity encountered in the work environment have a relationship to absenteeism? Additionally, the variable of job tenure will be taken into consideration in the present study.

Role Conflict and Absenteeism

Kahn et al. (1964) defined role conflict as the degree of incongruity and incompatibility of expectations associated with the role, where congruency and compatibility is judged relative to a set of standards or conditions which impinge upon role performance.

Research indicates direct relationships between the degree of role conflict a focal person experiences on the job and various negatively related job outcomes. These outcomes include job-related tensions and anxiety, job dissatisfaction, futility, propensity to withdraw, lack of confidence in the organization, inability to influence decision making, and unfavorable attitudes toward role senders (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964; Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970; Tosi, 1971; House & Rizzo, 1972; Miles & Perreault, 1976).

Kahn et al. (1964) postulated such concepts as

person-role conflict, interrole conflict and intrasender conflict. These concepts are supported by House and Rizzo (1972) who have devised an operational scale and definition for these measurements. House and Rizzo assume role conflict serves as an intervening variable made up of several facets. They propose the following definitions of Kahn's concepts:

1. Person role conflict - the extent to which role expectations are incongruent with the orientations or values of the role occupant.

2. Intersender conflict - the extent to which two or more role expectations from one role sender oppose those from one or more other role senders.

3. Intrasender conflict - the extent to which two or more role expectations from a single role sender are mutually incompatible.

4. Overload - the extent to which the various role expectations communicated to a role occupant exceed the amount of time and resources available for their accomplishment.

Thus, individuals in different roles may experience equivalent degrees of conflict from different sources and specific types of conflict may be different.

The focal person's internal standards or values, as well as time, resources or capabilities, may serve to moderate the degree of "felt role conflict" for the

individual. Not all workers respond negatively to role conflict. Evidence indicates that different types of workers respond to role conflict in different ways (Kahn et al., 1964; Lyons, 1971; Johnson & Stinson, 1975; Nicholson, Brown, & Chadwick-Jones, 1977). The personality of the focal person may modify relationships (Kahn et al., 1964; Lyons, 1971; Ivancevich & Donnelly, 1974; Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978).

Workers suffering from inner conflict which results from the process of trying to obtain two incompatible goals, when neither goal can be obtained without foregoing the other, develop certain defenses. Contradictory role expectations can lead to role conflict and an increase in frustration, anxiety, and psychosomatic illness. Frustration also leads to withdrawal from responsibility and to higher absenteeism rates.

It has been found that high levels of stress are related to employee absenteeism (Melbin, 1961). If the individual experiences high anxiety and tension levels, it appears highly likely that he would look for an excuse to avoid coming to work. By using such coping mechanisms as psychosomatic illnesses, the worker would avoid the stress by being absent because of the illness.

Additional reasons for role conflict being responsible for higher absenteeism rates is that conflict seems to increase the association with poor interpersonal

relationships between colleagues. It also probably decreases a liking for one's colleagues. This would no doubt mitigate any influence that the prospect of social interaction on the job might have in inducing the worker to want to come to work. Conflict has also been related to actual physiological change.

Role conflict, while generally seen as aversive by most role occupants, may be differentially moderated for the individual role occupant by intervening variables. One must take into consideration not only the duration and intensity of the stressor but also the intra-individual factors in the stressed subject to get a true picture of the stress situation.

Lower level jobs such as assembly line jobs are characterized by high levels of stress. Lower level jobs usually emcompass roles that are more clearly defined, but it is highly likely they will experience conflicting role demands from others (Hamner & Tosi, 1974). Thus, these lower level employees, perhaps lacking skills or experience (tenure) to seek different employment, will withdraw. Reluctance to leave the organization because of these reasons could result accordingly in the display of withdrawal in the form of higher absenteeism rather than turnover.

Factors in the environment also serve to modify,

moderate or intensify the degree of role conflict perceived by the role incumbent. Organizational complexity, size, and climate can each result in external demands or stimulus factors perceived as undesirable (McGrath, 1976; Friendlander & Margulis, 1969). Oftentimes in complex and/or large organizations, the individual may get lost in the organizational structure and lose his individualism. He may feel, as a result, that he has no stake in the organizational goals. Thus, there is no feeling of being a part of the organization. The individual cannot count on the organization to be concerned with his welfare. This can result in a stressful situation for the individual.

Supervisory relationships have been found to correlate with measures of leadership and organizational practices and the degree of experienced role conflict (House & Rizzo, 1972). Supervisory behavior has been identified as both a stressor and as a moderator of stress (Kaplan, 1959).

It quickly becomes intuitively evident, and is demonstrated by theory as well, that the individual must be suited to his work environment and that the work environment must be suited to the individual if conflict is to be avoided in relation to the individual and his job adjustment.

It is worthwhile to keep in mind that analogous to

the findings that role conflict can be moderated for the individual by internal and external factors, the degree of detrimental consequences sustained by the organization may likewise be moderated by the form of withdrawal used by the employee. Therefore, it could conceivably be healthier for the organization to experience a higher rate of absenteeism than to have a high degree of turnover. This permission to withdraw and have a "mental health" day would allow the worker a temporary respite from the conflict found on the job.

Research relating role conflict to absenteeism has been sparse and somewhat contradictory. Stress and job dissatisfaction have been shown to correlate positively (Lyons, 1971). However, there are studies which argue that job dissatisfaction does not relate to withdrawal, especially absenteeism (Nicholson, Brown, & Chadwick-Jones, 1976). Contrary to those findings, other research has indicated that there is indeed a relationship between stress and withdrawal or, more particularly, absenteeism (Talacchi, 1960; Hulin, 1968; Waters & Roach, 1971).

As in any research, there are inherent problems of measurements that must be worked through in studies whose purpose is to measure absenteeism (Chadwick-Jones, Brown, Nicholson, & Shepherd, 1971; Macy & Mervis, 1976; Cascio, 1976; Nicholson, Brown, & Chadwick-Jones, 1977). This of course leads to difficulty in generalizing from one study

to another and in replication.

The approach used in the present investigation will be to predict absenteeism from demographic data, tenure, and from stress; more specifically, role conflict as a variable that contribtues to absenteeism.

Role Ambiguity and Absenteeism

Kahn et al. (1964) defines role ambiguity as lack of clarity and predictability of the outcome of one's behavior.

Experimental studies have found that role ambiguity negatively affects efficiency when members did not know what roles they were to perform. Evidence from this same laboratory study indicated that role ambiguity reduced group satisfaction of the experience and increased the hostility level of the group over that of a control group. Field studies tend to agree with this finding and relate role ambiguity to a host of undesirable job-related outcomes (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964; Lyons, 1971; House & Rizzo, 1972; Ivancevich & Donnelly, 1974; Organ & Green, 1974).

Kahn's (1964) theory of roles states that role ambiguity results when necessary information is not given for a particular organizational position. People are more satisfied and effective under specific performance goals than under the more ambigious task to "do your best."

Role incumbents who experience role ambiguity will resort to coping behavior and solve the problem by using defense mechanisms. These defenses distort the reality of the situation; thus, role ambiguity will increase role dissatisfaction, tension and anxiety. The incumbent will also perform less efficiently.

Role ambiguity will result if the individual feels he receives less information than he would like to have. This also results in a feeling of threat for the role incumbent (Wispe & Thayer, 1957). Workers who have a high need for cognition will likely experience more role ambiguity than those who have a lower need (Kahn et al., 1964).

Role ambiguity, like most other variables, is a two-sided coin. Large numbers of individuals desire autonomy and responsibility. If a job demands more autonomy than the incumbent desires or his ability allows, role ambiguity will result. The other side of the coin would be to caution against structuring a job to the point that it becomes unbearable. Like role conflict, role ambiguity can be moderated or exacerbated by personal characteristics and needs of the role incumbent.

Environmental or organizational variables affect the degree of perceived role ambiguity (Spencer & Steers, 1980). In this regard, Kahn et al. (1964) suggests three

general organizational conditions which are significant contributors to role ambiguity: organizational complexity, rapid organizational change, and managerial philosophies about communication.

Role ambiguity has been found to be stressful in the upper organizational levels (Hamner & Tosi, 1974; Brief & Aldag, 1976; Drory, 1981). Individuals in upper-level managerial positions face major ambigious role definitions in the form of solving unstructured problems and operating under little clarity (Szilagyi, 1977; Szilagyi, Sims, & Keller, 1976). High-level employees not only have responsibility for their personal well-being and satisfaction, but they also must be concerned with the well-being of subordinates and others. This situation appears to carry a great health risk for the role incumbents. One such group is air traffic controllers. This group must seek personal job satisfaction. Also, they must be concerned with the safety of a large segment of the population. This considerable responsibility results in high levels of role ambiguity (Hurst & Rose, 1978).

It appears evident that highly responsible positions often result in high degrees of role ambiguity. This results in significant increases of psychosomatic illness for the role incumbent.

Employees in higher levels of the organizational

hierarchy usually possess higher education, such as a college degree; command a higher salary and have greater freedom of action. This freedom of action is characterized by a high degree of autonomy. The employee feels personally responsible for his work. An enriched job of this nature has been found to decrease stress (Hackman & Lawler, 1971; Abdel-Hamlin, 1978). However, in instances where the employee is given more autonomy than he can handle, an inverse relationship may occur. A direct relationship exists between the amount of autonomy and responsibility allowed on a job and absenteeism. Employees in this type of job are more free to manifest the results of role ambiguity in the form of psychological absence. Psychological absence may result when the employee absences himself from the workplace by playing golf with a client during working hours or by attending a three-hour executive lunch. While this type of activity is generally accepted by the organization from higher level employees, it is none the less a form of absenteeism from the job that can be utilized by the employee to reduce stress. Older, more tenured employees expect certain perquisites because of seniority. They expect that behavior that would be unacceptable for others will be accepted for them because of their length of service (Hill & Trist, 1955; Nicholson et al., 1976; Nicholson, Brown, & Chadwick-Jones,

1977). There appears to be no short-order method of decreasing role ambiguity. A fine line exists between too much autonomy and not enough.

A paradox exists for highly skilled, high longevity employees. An individual in this position who is experiencing role ambiguity may be unable to withdraw by leaving the organization. This individual may resort to being absent surreptitiously. By indulging in the aforementioned "public relations" golf game or the three-hour lunch, the employee exhibits an acceptable form of absence. This type of absence is of course difficult if not impossible to measure. However, it may be a disguise for the manifestation of the withdrawal behavior for the employee.

It is prudent to recall that organization and individual must be suited to each other. Otherwise, the organization and/or the individual will not progress satisfactorily. A symbiotic relationship must exist, a sort of symbolic balance. This balance will result in benefit to both employee and employer.

Evidence adduced from this study will be used to examine the relationship, if any, between role ambiguity and absenteeism. An ancillary investigation will look at the effects of the length of time employed in the current or similar position. This study will seek to establish a relationship between the independent variable of role

ambiguity and the dependent variable of absenteeism.

Absenteeism

This study will look at any reason the employee is not at work on a voluntary basis. This will include illnesses, personal reasons, and mental health days. Excluded will be scheduled vacations, holidays, jury duty, workshops, and any other condition where the employee is not expected to be present by the employer. Because of the various reasons for non-attendance on any given work day, absenteeism is difficult to measure.

Frequency of absence has been used in many studies. Frequency of absence counts only each incidence of absence. If an employee is absent on three consecutive days, it is counted as only one incidence of absence. If an employee is absent from work only one day and returns the next day, it is also counted as one incidence of absence. Total number of absences simply counts the total number of days an employee is not present at work. These and other methods used in recording absences have led to varied results in research.

Psychological withdrawal or absence is nearly impossbile to measure. While the employee may be physically present, his job may not get done or at least not get done satisfactorily. This results in lost revenue and productivity for the organization.

An additional stumbling block in the information postulated regarding employee absenteeism has been extrapolated from information gathered regarding turnover. Many researchers maintain that this is simply the same behavior but further down the continuum. This continuum starts with tardiness, then moves on to absenteeism, and finally to turnover. This continuum may not be justified in fact from empirical investigation.

Cross-sectional studies show an inverse relationship between job tenure and absence. Both male and females with short service show a consistent pattern of high absences, especially avoidable absences. An unreplicated study by Hill and Trist (1955) supports the opposite hypothesis. This study found that job tenure resulted in increased absence.

Other things being equal, if an employee enjoys his work and the tasks that characterize his job, one would expect the employee to have a strong desire to come to work (Porter & Steers, 1973; Hackman & Lawler, 1971; Newman, 1974).

When considering attendance, one must take into consideration both the motivation and the ability to come to work (Steers & Rhodes, 1978). Beehr (1978) found a relationship between role stress and general health. Poor health because of stress would render it difficult for the

employee to come to work. Regardless of the reason for absence, the average employee in the United States loses 5.1 days of work per year.

The end result of absenteeism is always the same: days or hours lost to the organization because the employee is not in attendance. A covert result, as previously mentioned, might be a decrease in turnover. An occasional absence may help to avoid turnover. Turnover has been found to have more deleterious results for the organization (Steers & Rhodes, 1978).

Porter and Steers (1973) argued that the difference in turnover and absence as a form of withdrawal is as follows:

1. Negative consequences for employee absenteeism is less than for turnover.

2. Absence is spontaneous and an easy decision.

3. Absence is a substitute for turnover when alternate forms of employment are unavailable.

Absenteeism may or may not be as detrimental to the organization as other forms of withdrawal. It is nonetheless a real problem with serious consequences (Porter & Steers, 1973; Morgan & Herman, 1976). It disrupts schedules, makes overstaffing a necessity, and creates additional avoidable increases in manpower costs and production. When an employee is absent on a scheduled work day, the

organization must supply a substitute or delay completion of the tasks previously scheduled to be completed by the employee during his period of absence. Either solution is costly to the organization.

Frequency of absences appears to be a better measure than duration within the psychological framework (Huse & Taylor, 1962; Nicholson, Brown, & Chadwick-Jones, 1976; Macy & Mervis, 1976). One-day absences are supposed to be voluntary or non-sickness absences. These short-term absences appear to be more likely to express worker alienation. Total number of days absent may be the same for two workers. One worker may show ten consecutive days of absence. This worker most likely was absent due to illness. The worker who has ten days of absence spread throughout the year in one-day intervals is most likely not ill. In 1972, short-term absences resulted in 43.8 million hours of lost work time (Hedges, 1973).

Problems in past studies on absenteeism have arisen due to incorrect methods of measurement criteria (Cheloha & Farr, 1980). The results of studies and the conclusions drawn by the experimenter may be affected by the method of measurement of absences. Because so many variables affect absences, problems arise. It is nearly impossible to separate voluntary from involuntary absences. Consideration must be given to indogenous and exogenous factors.

In addition, the best measures of absence has not been decided upon. A great need exists for a heuristic solution to this problem.

Millions of dollars lost each year make it necessary to further research absenteeism, its causes and cures. Therefore, this study will look at the aspect of absence in relation to role conflict and role ambiguity on the hypothesis that reduction in the one will result in reduction of the other.

Purpose

Job tenure will be measured in the expectation based on Selye's (1956) theory of the G. A. S. reaction. This expectation will be that long-tenured and short-tenured employees will experience the highest levels of stress and, in consequence, higher levels of withdrawal in the form of absenteeism.

As perceived role conflict and role ambiguity increase, absenteeism will also increase. This increase in role conflict and role ambiguity will be a result of the stress of adaptation experienced by the subjects.

Job tenure will be measured in the expectation that it will interact with perceived role conflict and role ambiguity to produce varying levels of absenteeism. Those subjects with high levels of perceived role conflict and role ambiguity will experience higher levels of

absenteeism than those subjects not experiencing these perceived stressors to the same high degree.

Job tenure will be measured in the expectation based on Seyle's (1956) theory of the G. A. S. reaction and on the literature presented thus far. This theory of the three stages of the stress reaction will be used to explain the effect of tenure on the dependent variable, absenteeism.

As in the initial stage of the G. A. S. reaction, early or inexperienced subjects will react to their perceived job stress with an alarm reaction. The manifestation of this alarm reaction will result in a higher incidence of absenteeism. Because the subject has not yet learned coping mechanisms to deal with the physiological or psychological stress reaction, he will make an attempt to withdraw from the noxious situation.

This reaction would be in line with Selye's (1956) contention that the initial stages of the stress reaction results in the body sending out an alarm. This alarm will result in a higher rate of perceived job role conflict and ambiguity and, consequently, a higher rate of absenteeism. This subject will display higher absenteeism rates than will occur later in the subject's career as the suhject learns to adapt to the situation.

Subjects in the middle stages of the tenure continuum

will cease to display an alarm reaction to the stress of role conflict and role ambiguity. By this time, the subject will have adopted coping mechanisms. The physiological and psychological reaction to stress will return to near normal. Therefore, the subject will have less need to withdraw as perceived stress will diminish. Additionally, subjects in the middle tenure group will have gone through a "weeding out" process whereby the majority of those subjects who could not adapt to the stress will have withdrawn completely from the noxious situation by leaving the organization.

While in the adaptation phase of the G. A. S. syndrome, the subjects will experience less perceived stress in the form of role conflict and role ambiguity. Consequently, they will have less need to avoid the situation by being absent from work. This will result in a lower rate of absenteeism than is displayed by either the inexperienced subjects or by subjects with many years of experience.

Finally, subjects with the highest degree of job experience will go into the third stage of the G. A. S.: the stage of exhaustion. Many years of maintaining coping mechanisms will result in exhaustion. The subject will then begin to experience high levels of perceived stress as in the initial stages of the alarm reaction.

Again, the manifestation of the exhaustion stage of the reaction will result in a high incidence of absenteeism. Because the subject is exhausted from years of coping, he will no longer be able to deal with the physiological and psychological stress reaction and will display higher rates of absenteeism by making an effort to withdraw.

This reaction would be in line with Selye's (1956) contention that the final stage of the stress reaction results in the body becoming exhausted. This exhaustion will result in a high rate of perceived stress which will increase absenteeism rates over those that had been experienced by the subject earlier in his career during the adaptation stage.

On the basis of the literature presented thus far, the main purpose of the present study was to determine whether differences in perceived role conflict and role ambiguity and job tenure are associated with differences in absenteeism.

The following hypotheses were tested:

Stress leads to absenteeism, role conflict leads to stress, and therefore should lead to absenteeism.

1.(a) A statistically significant overall difference in absenteeism will be found among the two groups with different levels of perceived role conflict intensity and also among the three groups with different levels of

tenure. Both main effects will be statistically significant at $p < .05$.

(b) Workers in the low tenure group (1-7 years) and workers in the high tenure group (14+ years) will have a significantly higher incidence of role conflict than workers in the middle tenure group (7-14 years) at the $p < .05$ level of significance.

Stress leads to absenteeism, role ambiguity leads to stress and therefore should lead to absenteeism.

2.(a) A statistically significant overall difference in absenteeism will be found among the two groups with different levels of perceived role ambiguity intensity and also among the three groups with different levels of tenure. Both main effects will be statistically significant at $p < .05$.

(b) Workers in the low tenure group (1-7 years) and workers in the high tenure group (14+ years) will have a significantly higher incidence of role ambiguity than workers in the middle tenure group (7-14 years) at the $p < .05$ level of significance.

Method

Sample

Data for 75 teachers presently employed by a local school district were obtained. Participants took part in the study on a voluntary basis. Data were gathered from thirteen (13) different schools. Participating schools were from the elementary (8), middle (2), and high school (3) levels. This widespread diversity of subjects was used in an effort to minimize any possibility of sampling bias. A preliminary letter was sent through the school courier system, with permission from the superintendent of schools. This preliminary letter was to apprize all principals in the school district of the upcoming study. It also contained a permission form for principals to sign, giving their permission to have their faculty take part, on a voluntary basis.

Schools that responded positively to the request that their faculty take part in the study were forwarded a self-administered questionnaire for each faculty member. This self-administered questionnaire was distributed to those faculty members desiring to participate. Included with the questionnaires were self-addressed, stamped envelopes with instructions that they be returned within five days.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire used consisted of two (2) parts (see appendix). Part I was a demographic worksheet. Social security numbers were used in place of names to insure anonymity. This demographic worksheet requested information regarding sex of respondent, number of years in teaching and a self-report of number and cause of absences.

Part II was a questionnaire consisting of 24 items designed to measure role conflict and role ambiguity (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970). The measure included 13 items designed to tap role conflict and 11 items designed to tap role ambiguity. These items represented the 24 items which had the highest factor loadings from the original scale of 30 items. Items that showed a lower factor loading weight than .30 according to Rizzo, House and Lirtzman's validated questionnaire were deleted. Realibilities for the measure have been found on the original scale of .816 to .820 for role conflict and .780 to .808 for role ambiguity. They report an intercorrelation between the two role measures for one sample of .25 ($p < .05$), comprised of 200 subjects and for another sample of .01, comprised of 400 subjects.

Subjects were asked to answer each question on a seven (7) point likert scale ranging from very true to very false. They were asked to use their personal perceptions of their

present job. Scores were summed for each individual factor and dichotomized to yield an upper and lower group for role conflict and role ambiguity. Scores from the questionnaire were dichotomized at the mean for the two variables of role conflict and role ambiguity. Those scores at or above the mean on the conflict score were classified as having high conflict, and those below the mean were classified as having low conflict. The ambiguity scores were classified in a like manner. Those at or above the mean were classified as having high ambiguity, and those below the mean were classified as having low ambiguity.

The demographic worksheet in Part I of the questionnaire asked the subject to designate number of active years in the profession. This information was used to designate the tenure group of each subject.

A permission form was also included. This was used to obtain permission to look at each subject's attendance records for the present school year. In this way, actual official absences were obtained. A self-report of absences was obtained. This information was not necessary due to the cooperation of subjects in granting their permission for their attendance records to be reviewed.

Additionally, a cover letter and instructions accompanied each questionnaire to make certain that all respondents fully understood the questionnaire.

Attendance records, by social security number, were used to verify absences for a period of approximately seven months, August through February. Records covered the school year in which the questionnaire was administered. Absences were treated as a continuous variable. Total number of absences was used. Any voluntary day of absence was counted. This included sick-leave days and personal-leave days. Jury duty, workshop attendance, and other non-voluntary days were not included.

Data Analysis

The purpose of this study was to determine if stress, as measured by perceived role conflict and role ambiguity and job tenure, is related to absenteeism. Actual absences, as recorded from official attendance records, were used.

Absences were in retrospect from the date of the questionnaire. Role conflict and role ambiguity, as perceived by the subject, were measured by a seven-point scale. Absences covered approximately seven months, in an effort to reduce variance by studying as wide a range of time as was feasible. This period of time started from the first scheduled work day for the year until the date of the study.

Scores on the role conflict and role ambiguity seven-point scale were summed individually for each subject, yielding two scores per questionnaire: one to measure

role conflict, and the other to measure role ambiguity. These scores were assigned to a high or a low group for each of the two variables of role conflict and role ambiguity. The high group was comprised of those subjects whose scores were above the mean of 49 out of a possible 91 on the conflict variable and a mean of 20 out of a possible 70 on the ambiguity score. Those falling below the respective means were designated into the low groups of each variable.

Additionally, subjects were divided into three groups for job tenure. These groups were comprised of 27 subjects in the low tenure group (1-7 years), 27 subjects in the medium tenure group (8-14 years) and 21 subjects in the high tenure group (14+ years). Only active years in the profession were counted. This span of years ranged from 1 year to 37 years.

Absenteeism was treated as a fixed, continuous variable.

Two (2) two-way fixed ANOVAS were used to analyze the data. One ANOVA was used to study the effects of role conflict and job tenure on absenteeism, and a second ANOVA was used to determine the effect of role ambiguity and job tenure on absenteeism. Subjects in the respective cells were unequal.

The design of the ANOVAS were as follows:

Subjects in Table 1 are graphically displayed in cells by mean scores on absenteeism. Each cell depicts a category corresponding to the data used in computing the ANOVA for role conflict and job tenure.

Table 1

Mean Number of Absences by

Role Conflict and Job Tenure

Job Tenure	Role Conflict	
	Low	High
Low (1-7 years)	3.15 (n=13)	4.64 (n=14)
Medium (8-14 years)	3.25 (n=14)	4.12 (n=13)
High (14+ years)	1.89 (n=9)	4.29 (n=12)

Subjects in Table 2, like subjects in Table 1, are grouped by mean scores on absenteeism according to job tenure, but Table 2 displays groups according to role ambiguity.

Perusal of these two tables gives easy access to the finding that, generally speaking subjects with high levels of either role conflict or role ambiguity tend to have higher levels of absenteeism. Accordingly, subjects with low scores on the role conflict and role ambiguity questionnaire tend to have lower rates of absenteeism in general than those with higher rates.

Table 2

Mean Number of Absences by

Role Ambiguity and Job Tenure

Job Tenure	Role Ambiguity	
	Low	High
Low (1-7 years)	3.58 (n=12)	4.20 (n=15)
Medium (8-14 years)	2.93 (n=14)	4.46 (n=13)
High (14+ years)	2.35 (n=10)	4.09 (n=11)

By separately analyzing the variables of role conflict and role ambiguity, an effort was made to more closely define a significant relationship between the dependent and independent variables.

In this study as in many psychological experiments, a finite, fixed model was used. This model is recommended by Ferguson (1976). Main effects were examined as were any interactions between the two main effects variables.

The two main effects for the first ANOVA were role conflict and job tenure; and for the second ANOVA, role ambiguity and job tenure.

Due to the results obtained in the two ANOVAS, no post hoc test was in order. Job tenure was not significant as a main effect. The interaction between job tenure and role ambiguity was not significant. The variable of role

conflict, which did show a significant main effect, was defined in two levels only, low and high. It was clear without any further difinition that the means were significantly different.

Results

A significant relationship between role conflict and absences was supported by the data. No other main effects variable was shown to have a significant effect on absenteeism. In addition, no interactions between the main effects variables were found to have support in the data.

Table 3 represents mean number of absences for each group by tenure level. The results from the ANOVA appear to be uniform for all levels of tenure and show no significance, thus resulting in failure to show support for Selye's (1956) G. A. S. theory of stress arousal over time.

Table 3

Mean Number of Absences by Tenure

Low (1-7 years)	Medium (8-14 years)	High (14+ years)
3.93	3.67	3.26
(n=27)	(n=27)	(n=21)

Table 4 gives mean number of absences by role conflict score. This table shows a definite trend. Subjects with a lower incidence of perceived role conflict show a lower incidence of absences than subjects who scored higher

on the questionnaire of perceived role conflict. This table lends support to the hypothesis that perceived role conflict contributes to absenteeism.

Table 4

Mean Number of Absences by Role Conflict

Low	High
2.88	4.36
(n=36)	(n=39)

Table 5 depicts mean number of absences by role ambiguity. While no significant effect was found on this variable, there is apparently a trend for those with lower levels of perceived role ambiguity as measured by the questionnaire to show lower levels of absenteeism. Subjects whose scores were above the mean on the perceived role ambiguity questionnaire displayed higher levels of absenteeism than those below the mean.

Table 5

Mean Number of Absences by Role Ambiguity

Low	High
2.99	4.26
(n=36)	(n=39)

Table 6 supports the hypothesis that role conflict is associated with absenteeism. This hypothesis was found to be significant at the $p < .05$ level. The role conflict main effect resulted in an F-ratio of 4.466, ($p < .038$). The main effect variable of job tenure resulted in an F-ratio of .354 and showed a significance level of $p < .703$. This fails to support the hypothesis that job tenure has a significant effect on absenteeism. The interaction between role conflict and job tenure resulted in an F-ratio of .360 with a significance level of $p < .699$. Therefore, no interaction effects could be found.

Table 6

3 x 2 Fixed Effects ANOVA, with Role Conflict, Job Tenure, and Absenteeism

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Significance of F
Tenure (T)	6.783	2	3.391	0.354	0.703
Conflict (C)	42.782	1	42.782	4.466	0.038*
2-way Interaction (T x C)	6.902	2	3.451	0.360	0.699

*$p < .05$

Table 7 supports the postulation that differences in perceived role ambiguity and job tenure are associated with absenteeism was not supported. The role ambiguity and job

tenure main effects resulted in F-ratios of 3.038 and 0.245, respectively. The levels of significance were $p < .086$ for the ambiguity main effect and $p < .784$ for the job tenure main effect. Neither variable was significant at the $p < .05$ level of significance. Therefore, support for the hypothesis was not found. The interaction between the two variables proved insignificant, resulting in an F-ratio of .228 and a significance level of that F-ratio of $p < .797$.

Table 7

3 x 2 Fixed Effects ANOVA, with Role Ambiguity, Job Tenure, and Absenteeism

Source Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Significance of F
Tenure (T)	4.796	2	2.398	0.245	.784
Ambiguity (A)	29.779	1	29.779	3.038	.086
2-way Interaction (T x A)	4.473	2	2.236	0.228	.797

*$p < .05$

Table 8 depicts supporting data for the hypothesis of 1(b). This hypothesis states that subjects with low job tenure and subjects with high job tenure would have a significantly higher incidence of perceived role conflict than subjects in the medium tenure group. This hypothesis

failed to be supported by the data. Means used in this ANOVA were taken from the scores on the questionnaire on the role conflict variables. These means depict the following categories: low tenure, 49.07; medium tenure, 47.85; and high tenure, 52.24.

Table 8

One-Way ANOVA of Job Tenure with Role Conflict

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Significance of F
Tenure	235.651	2	117.826	.376	.688

Job tenure showed no significant effects. The main effect of tenure level resulted in an F-ratio of .367 and a significance of $p < .688$.

In Table 9 the main effect of perceived role ambiguity in relationship to job tenure were not significant. Table 9, using the mean scores derived from the questionnaire on role ambiguity, resulted in the following means: 20.26 for the low tenured group, 20.89 for the medium tenured group, and 21.24 for the high tenured group. These means failed to support the hypothesis 2(b) that subjects with low job tenure and subjects with high job tenure would have significantly higher role ambiguity than subjects in the medium tenured group.

Table 9

One-Way ANOVA of Job Tenure with

Role Ambiguity

Source Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Significance of F
Tenure	12.019	2	6.009	.059	.943

Role ambiguity as illustrated in Table 9 failed to be significant at the $p < .05$ level as predicted. The main effect resulted in an F-ratio of .059 and significance level of .943.

Figures 1 and 2 show the plotted means for each level of role conflict and job tenure by absenteeism and role ambiguity and job tenure by absenteeism, respectively. Figure 1 represents the results from Table 1: role conflict and job tenure by absence. Table 2 is plotted in Figure 2 to show the results of job tenure, role ambiguity, and absenteeism.

These plotted results aid in the interpretation of the no interaction findings. While there are no interaction effects in either figure, both figures graphically depict that the groups with high conflict and high ambiguity levels fall above all groups with low conflict and low ambiguity. These figures are in lieu of the unnecessary post hoc procedure.

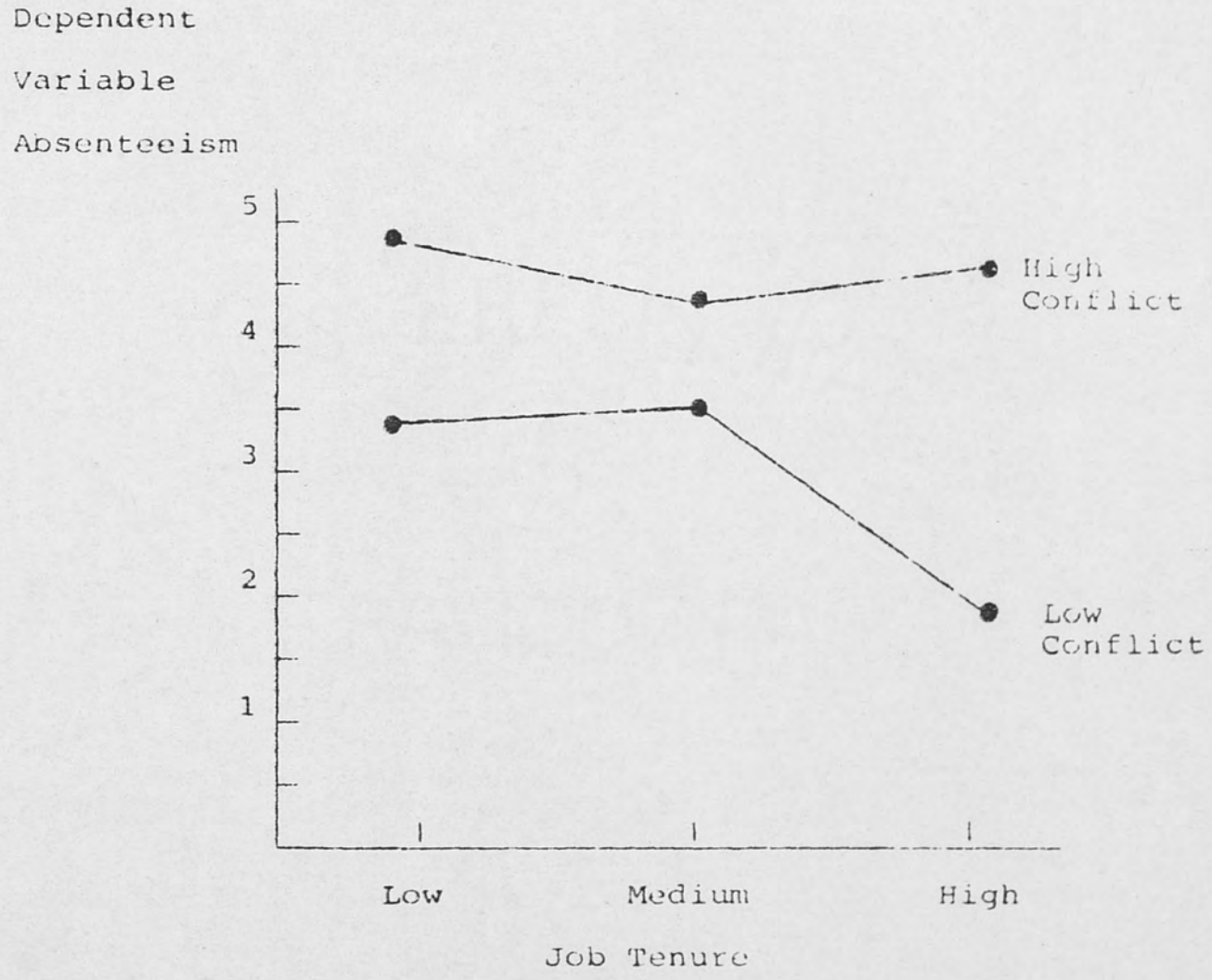

Figure 1. Mean number of absences by role conflict and job tenure.

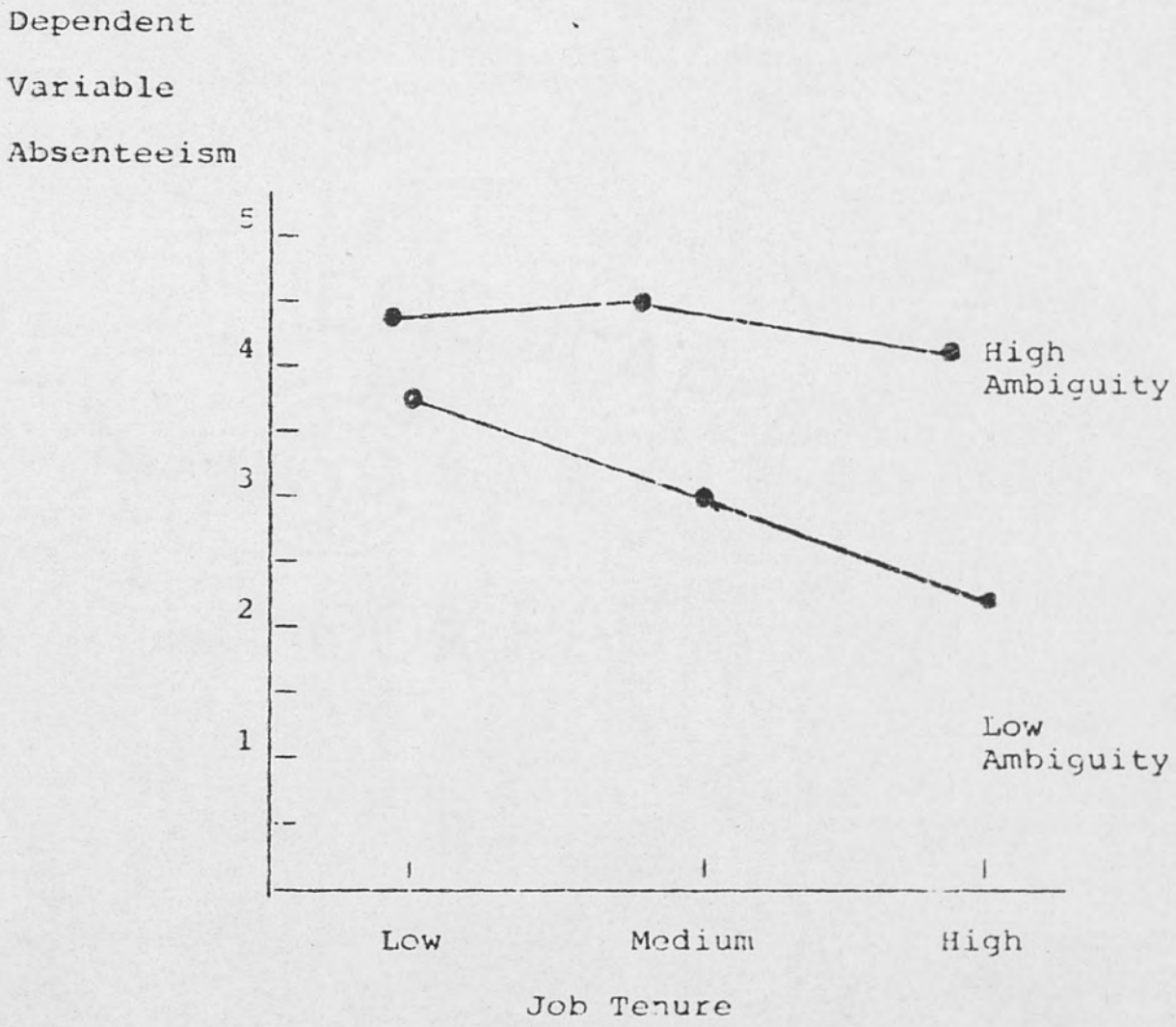

Figure 2. Mean number of absences by role ambiguity and job tenure.

Discussion

The hypothesis that differences in absenteeism would be associated with differences in perceived role conflict was supported. The results clearly indicate that those persons who were classified in the high conflict group were significantly more likely to have higher levels of absenteeism. While conflict is the only tested variable that proved significant in relationship to absenteeism, other variables showed a definite trend in that direction.

Evidently, it is safe to say that perceived role conflict and absenteeism show a definite relationship due to a .038 level of significance. There was no significant difference found between subjects in the high ambiguity and subjects in the low ambiguity group in terms of absenteeism. However, there is a definite trend which indicates that these subjects also show increases in absenteeism as perceived role ambiguity increases. These findings fell slightly short of the $p < .05$ level of significance but did have a $p < .086$ level of significance. This finding may be a result of the small number of subjects per cell. Perhaps if cell sizes were extended to include larger numbers of subjects the findings would prove significant. An additional cause of this result may be due to the fact

that subjects in the study displayed very low levels of perceived role ambiguity as evidenced in the overall mean of 20 out of a possible 70 on the questionnaire. This mean score indicates that subjects felt that they did not in fact experience role ambiguity in their job. The average rating for ambiguity was a 2, very false, as defined by the questionnaire.

It is interesting that job tenure appeared to have little or no effect on absenteeism. These data failed to support Selye's (1956) G. A. S. theory of reaction.

The data as previously stated support the finding that high perceived role conflict leads to higher rates of absenteeism than low role conflict intensity. This would indicate that role conflict is indeed a highly stressful state in that it contributes in the desire of the individual to withdraw from the noxious state precipitated by role conflict by being absent from work. This finding lends further support to studies by Kahn et al. (1964), Lyon (1971), House and Rizzo (1972), Ivancevich and Donnelly (1974), and Organ and Green (1974) that high perceived role conflict results in myriad adverse work related outcomes.

On the other hand, data from this study tend to refute findings that stress does not lead to withdrawal behavior on the part of the respondent (Nicholson, Brown, & Chadwick-Jones, 1976). Other studies previously cited conclude, like the present study, that a relationship does

indeed exist between the two variables of absenteeism and role conflict (Talacchi, 1960; Hulin, 1968; Waters & Roach, 1971).

Role ambiguity, unlike role conflict, failed to support the hypothesis that it would significantly affect absenteeism. The fact that a trend is displayed in the data leaves open the possibility that the job position of the subjects screened may be affected by the hierarchical structure of the organization to which they are members. This could have a possible moderating effect of the role ambiguity variable (Hamner & Tosi, 1974; Brief & Aldag, 1976; Drory, 1981; Szilagyi, 1977; Szilagyi, Sims & Keller, 1976).

Obviously, the effect of job tenure on absenteeism did not prove significant in this study. It is possible that if the personality factor of the respondents were measured, a significant difference would be found. The personality factor may influence who remains in the profession and who withdraws. Those subjects who learn to cope with stress early in their careers are more likely to remain. Previous research indicates that personality variables may play an important part in the reaction of subjects to environmental stress (Ivanevich & Donnelly, 1974; Lyons, 1971; Kyracou & Sutcliffe, 1978; Kahn et al., 1964).

Respondents defined by this study to have low stress

levels also show a trend towards decreasing rates of absenteeism. This may be due to the personality of the subjects rather than job tenure. Subjects who make adjustments to stress may do so early in their career and this adjustment may last throughout their career.

The mean rate for absences for the high tenured/low conflict group of 1.89 was greatly different from the 3.15 and 3.25 means found in the low tenure/low conflict and the medium tenure/low conflict groups, respectively. This downward trend was also evidenced in the means of the low ambiguity subjects. This trend was slightly less divergent from the other two groups than for the the conflict scores.

It may be found upon further research that the coping mechanisms employed by these subjects decreased stress due to the personality variables and thus absenteeism was decreased.

Conclusions

Clearly, role conflict intensity levels affect the degree of absenteeism experienced by the individual. This may be a result of the fact that role conflict has been found to affect low level job positions. While the subjects of this study are considered professionals, with college degrees, they are none the less at the lowest level position in the organizational structure. This fact appears to have contributed to the findings that role conflict and absenteeism are related for this particular group of subjects. It also appears to confirm that if organizations are able to find ways to decrease or reduce role conflict, especially for their lower level jobs, absenteeism would likewise decrease.

Since role conflict is an area where improvement is possible, organizations hopefully can moderate absenteeism within the organization. This would be possible by closely examining the position of job incumbents in relationship to the structure of the job and also by looking at supervisors. Supervisors may precipitate stress in individuals (Kaplan, 1959).

These findings indicate that it would be worthwhile for organizations to take steps to identify persons who

are subject to role conflict and the particular type of supervisor that they work under. Training supervisors to minimize role conflict for all employees could greatly alleviate the problem of absenteeism as well.

It would be unwise to completely dismiss the findings regarding role ambiguity in this study. The prevailing trend indicates a realtionship to some degree between perceived role ambiguity and absenteeism. Role ambiguity may have failed to reach significance in this study due to the effect that subjects in this study fall somewhere in a gray area between being a professional but lacking in the ability to greatly contribute to the decision making process of the organization.

Job tenure which failed to be significant, likewise, cannot be totally dismissed. It appears that subjects with low conflict who have remained with the organization for an extended period of time have greatly decreased their absences. This condition should be further examined in an effort to determine what particular aspect of low conflict and high tenure is responsible for the reduction in absenteeism.

Appendix

I

PERSONAL WORKSHEET

Social Security Number_____

Sex: F M

School _____

Number of years in profession (active) _____

Number of years at present school _____

Number of absences since first work day this school year

1981-82 _____

Number of absences by category:

ILLNESSES:

Personal _____

Member of Family _____

DEATH OF FAMILY MEMBER _____

DOCTOR'S APPOINTMENT _____

MENTAL HEALTH DAY _____

PERSONAL REASON - (other than illness) _____

OTHER _____
Specify:

TOTAL NUMBER OF DAY ABSENT_____

I HEREBY GIVE MY PERMISSION TO HAVE MY PERSONNEL RECORDS EXAMINED FOR THE PURPOSE OF OBTAINING ABSENCES FOR THIS SCHOOL YEAR.

Social Security No._____

II

FOR EACH ITEM STATEMENT PRESENTED BELOW, PLEASE INDICATE THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE STATEMENT DESCRIBES YOUR PRESENT CONDITIONS AS AN EMPLOYEE. (Please circle appropriate number).

Statement	Very True	True	Partly True	Not Sure	Partly False	False	Very False
1. I feel certain about how much authority I have	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
2. Clear, planned goals and objectives for my job.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
3. I have to do things that should be done differently.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
4. Lack of policies and guidelines to help me.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
5. I am able to act the same regardless of the group I am with.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
6. I work under incompatible policies and guidelines.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
7. I know that I have divided my time properly.	7	6	5	4	3	1	1
8. I receive an assignment without the manpower to complete it.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
9. I know what my responsibilities are.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
10. I work on unnecessary things.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Statement	Very True	True	Partly True	Not Sure	Partly False	False	Very False
11. I have to buck a a rule or guideline in order to carry out an assignment	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
12. I have to "feel" my way in performing my duties.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
13. I feel certain how I will be evaluated for a raise or promotion.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
14. I have just the right amount of work to do.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
15. I work with two or more groups who operate quite differently.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
16. I know exactly what is expected of me.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
17. I receive incompatible requests from two or more people.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
18. I do things that are apt to be accepted by one person and not accepted by others.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
19. I receive an assignment without adequate resources and materials to execute it.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
20. Explanation is clear of what has to be done.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Statement	Very True	True	Partly True	Not Sure	Partly False	False	Very False
21. I work on unnecessary things.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
22. I have to work under vague directives or orders	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
23. I perform work that suits my values.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
24. I do not know if my work will be acceptable to my boss.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

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